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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 005032

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2015

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KUWAIT-IRAQ RELATIONS

SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS CENTER CHIEF ON IRAQ AND
HIS POSSIBLE MOVE TO BAGHDAD AS AMBASSADOR

REF: A. KUWAIT 4451

[B](#). KUWAIT 3507

[C](#). KUWAIT 1120

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: Lt. General (Ret.) Ali Mohammed Hassan Al Mu'min, head of Kuwait's Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC), met with poloff on November 28 and discussed his candidacy for ambassador to Iraq, the extension of the HOC's mandate until spring 2006, and Sunni-Shi'a relations in Kuwait. The meeting was marked by frank comments from General Ali, the former Chief of Staff who retired from the military as the highest ranking Shi'a officer in 2002. Saying that Kuwaiti Sunni-Shi'a relations were "suffering" due to the growing influence of Sunni fundamentalists and Zargawi's influence on youth throughout the region, General Ali counseled that "there would have to be more blood shed in Iraq" before the general public called for peace and the violence ended. The General wanted to clear the air over misperceptions that his interest in Iraq was focused only on southern Iraq due to his ties to the Shi'a community. The former chief of staff also described himself in the order of Kuwaiti, Arab, Muslim, and lastly Shi'a, offering some insight as to how he views his loyalties and how effective he might be if he served in Iraq. A readout of his November 29-December 1 trip to Baghdad will be coming septel. End Summary.

HOC Will Be Around in 2007

[2](#). (C) General Ali opened the meeting by stating that when he came back from medical treatment for early-stage prostate cancer in England in August, he was fully prepared to find the HOC gone, its mission returned to the various offices in the ministries of the Interior (MOI), Health (MOH), and Foreign Affairs (MFA). Instead he was surprised to find that the HOC would remain, but that it would be broken up into separate offices within those ministries, and that he would retain all administrative control over its authority (ref b). Seated in his office within the MFA's Consular Affairs building in the industrial area of Shuwaikh, General Ali said that he initially doubted the separation of the HOC would work, but allowed that he now has the staff he needs to continue HOC's missions inside of Iraq. The HOC's humanitarian mission continues in both in medical evacuation and treatment cases as well as funding health centers and schools. The General said that he expected the HOC to be able to make valuable contributions to Iraq's people until "at least" 2007.

13. (C) Beginning in early 2004, the HOC received five or six three-month extensions to continue its work (ref c). General Ali admitted that the Council of Ministers' failure to grant longer extensions annoyed him, but he hoped that the latest extension, which continues the HOC mandate until March 31, 2006, will be renewed without "all the work and effort" it took previously. Stating that it was the Foreign Minister, Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who kept him "reined in" in the past, Ali added that the FM now "gave up" and let him travel to Iraq when necessary, no longer questioning the necessity of his travel. General Ali has traveled to Iraq over half a dozen times since 2003 and visited Baghdad as recently as November 29.

Ambassador Ali?

14. (C) On his candidacy for ambassador to Iraq, General Ali was blunt: he claimed that the FM had approached him 6 months ago and asked if he would accept the ambassadorship. The General replied that he "did not seek out any more glory" and would only "accept the job if his services were needed by the State of Kuwait." Intimating that he found the HOC job enough of a challenge, he shared that there had been another candidate for the job but that he had dropped out after being given an ambassadorship to another country. General Ali went on to say that the FM then told him that his nomination had been discussed with MP Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager, head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and that it was now "well-known in Kuwait" that he was asked to go to Baghdad.

15. (C) General Ali voiced concerns over the quality of life issues in Baghdad, especially for his wife, and asked poloff if the USG could make space for the Kuwaiti Embassy within

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the Green Zone, since that is where he felt most "comfortable." He added that he had been investigating security firms which could provide bodyguards for him in Iraq. According to Iraqis to whom he spoke, the firms should all provide at least one Kurd bodyguard because the "Kurdish will not have a problem shooting an Arab while an Arab might have a problem doing so," adding that he understood the logic behind it and would look to ensure that he had a Kurd or other non-Arab in his security entourage.

Kuwaiti First and Foremost

16. (C) When discussing how General Ali identified himself, the General insisted that he was first and foremost Kuwaiti, and pledged to defend the Constitution of his country. He would then consider himself Arab, then Muslim, and lastly Shi'a. "So you see," he affirmed, "I am a Shi'a but that is only 25% of me. The rest is the order that I just told you." The former Chief of Staff criticized those who said he focused only on his Shi'a "brothers" stressing that his travel for the HOC included the Kurdish north as well as the Sunni Triangle and that he tried to ensure donations from the GOK were spread fairly around the country. Ali said that the GOK may have given Najaf 5 million dollars in aid, but that he was also able to get Fallujah 3.5 million dollars as well (through private donations), a city that he claimed was "full of former Ba'athist military officers."

Have Guard, Will Travel

17. (C) General Ali has traveled extensively through Iraq, criss-crossing the country since Coalition troops went in during spring 2003. He remarked that he felt safer in 2003 when he traveled in an Iraqi-owned car with a couple of Iraqis as his guards, traveling from Basra to Mosul and towns in between, than he did traveling to and from the Green Zone in the company of U.S. troops. He added that he was able to

meet with a number of Iraqi local leaders, including Ayatollah Al-Sistani.

Shi'a and Sunni Relations

18. (C) General Ali spoke of his concerns of a faltering relationship between Kuwaiti Sunnis and Shi'as. He said there was an increase in the allowance of takfiri ideology within Kuwait and that an unidentified Kuwaiti MP had spoken in defense of a Sunni Imam who preached takfiri ideology. (Note: "takfir" refers to the practice of accusing others, including some Muslims, of apostasy, a crime punishable by death in some extreme interpretations of Islam. End note.) According to the General, the negative influences and restrictiveness of the fundamentalist Sunnis began in the 1960s when Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt cracked down on the Islamic Brotherhood (aka Muslim Brotherhood) and many of them moved to the Gulf, especially Kuwait. In addition, he said that a number of Saudis have also moved into Kuwait since the 1980s, pushing their Wahabbi traditions and thinking. Evidence of this could be seen during prayertime, "when Sunnis cross their arms to pray, something that they never did in the past," he claimed. "This, combined with the fact that the Government has done little to stop it, is why we are now having problems."

19. (C) Going on to talk about the attack on a Shi'a mosque in Jahra on October 7 (ref a), he said "the recent incident in Jahra is surprising only because it did not happen (here) before." General Ali pointed out that the attack was possible "only in an atmosphere of tolerance for such action," and that excess money and fundamentalist influence among Kuwaiti youth made it possible. "The Government must watch out. You cannot stop this type of thinking after it has spread across the country," he counseled, warning that the influence of Zargawi and others in Iraq was spilling over to Kuwait. General Ali advised that Zargawi was not only receiving aid from Jordan and Syria but from other neighbors (read Iran) and that his influence would only grow in the near term. The General commented that the region would have to see and shed more blood before the people "had enough" and called for true peace.

Bio Note

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110. (C) Bio Note: Lt. General Ali was known to keep a cadre of Shi'a officers close to him during his time as Chief of Staff (March 1991 - December 2002). This led to animosity within the upper military ranks which echoes today. A recent purge of intelligence officers within the J-2 office at the Ministry of Defense in April saw all of the Shi'a officers reassigned elsewhere. In addition, Kuwaiti contacts have told poloff that the reason the HOC cannot get longer extensions is because many Kuwaitis are uncomfortable with Ali, as a Shi'a, having control over so much money. Ali's family was originally from Saudi Arabia. He is married with five children, three sons and two daughters. One of his sons works in the Ministry of Defense, one in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and one in the private sector. His older daughter is married to a Finn and lives in London. His younger daughter lives at home. Ali speaks English fluently and was trained in the U.K. He received treatment for prostate cancer in July 2005 in England.

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